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July 31, 2018

Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher
State Capitol, Room 2114
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: **AB 3080 (Gonzalez-Fletcher) – Support**
As amended May 25, 2018

Dear Assemblywoman Gonzalez Fletcher:

The Consumer Federation of California supports AB 3080 (Gonzalez Fletcher), which will prevent employers from requiring workers to sign waiver of rights agreements as a condition of employment.

Recent revelations of widespread sexual harassment have focused policy makers on the need to ensure that victims have access to justice and that violators are held accountable. They have also demonstrated the harm that comes from keeping these cases confidential and exposing countless other women to the same treatment.

Forced arbitration of sexual harassment claims epitomizes all of the most harmful practices that have enabled widespread abuse to go undetected for decades. Workers are forced to sign away their rights in order to get hired. When they seek to report violations, they are denied the ability to go to court or a state agency for help. Instead they are trapped in the employer's handpicked arbitration system. The system is secret and confidential, protecting abusers from any public scrutiny. State agencies have no knowledge of repeat violations and there is no public record.

Under forced arbitration, these same rules apply to workers who seek to remedy pay equity violations, outright discrimination, and all types of wage theft. They lose access to state agencies charged with worker protection, where staff can help with language or cultural barriers and can protect them from retaliation. They lose access to court, effectively denying them access to counsel who can assist a low-wage worker in navigating a case against a wealthier and more sophisticated employer. They are on their own in an arbitration process they did not chose and do not understand, often against a large corporation that established the rules and paid for the arbitrator.

California has passed a plethora of worker laws and protections and those protections must be enforced to be meaningful. No employer should be able to escape accountability by forcing workers to waive rights. It is time for California to take bold action to protect workers from harassment, discrimination, and wage theft. AB 3080 is an important step toward protecting victims and holding violators accountable.

For these reasons, we strongly support AB 3080 (Gonzalez Fletcher).

Sincerely,

Richard Holober
Executive Director